

Privilege—Mr. Chrétien

do not like to mention this as it is a very painful experience for the hon. member for Saint-Maurice. He was trimmed, pounced on, trounced on and jounced on by the government of Quebec because of these sales tax proposals last year. Before the budget was brought down there was a story in the *Toronto Star* which indicated there were going to be these sales tax proposals in the budget. The actual sales tax proposals were outlined in the *Toronto Star*. This was also done on CTV national news on April 9. There were also allegations that the CTV had said there were going to be changes to research and development benefits for corporations. They had revealed that before the budget. The minister was very, very injured by the fact that allegations of leaks had been made against him.

● (1520)

Your Honour dealt with the matter on April 17. You pointed out that the minister had made it clear that there was ample room for speculation with respect to research and development benefits as this subject had been discussed at a recent first ministers' conference. That is right on, and a wonderful precedent in relation to the matter he is bringing up here this afternoon. His excuse last year was that research and development benefits had been discussed at a first ministers' conference. The whole House knows that energy taxes and energy tax credits, and the whole business, have been discussed at first ministers' conferences. Your Honour then went on to say:

In addition to those, it seems to me that the matter has been disposed of in a complete way, as far as this House is concerned, by the minister's explanation that he was not able to discover and did not take any responsibility in any way for any leak of budgetary information.

I say that I am not able to discover and I do not take any responsibility in any way for any leak of budgetary information, and in fact there was no leak, so certainly I am not going to take the responsibility.

Then Your Honour went on to say:

—I must express some serious doubt whether the conventional budgetary secrecy falls within the area of privilege at all.

You dismissed the whole allegation and the fact that it could have been a breach of privilege last year. The member has cited nothing to indicate any leak of budgetary secrecy. There was no leak, Mr. Speaker. There was scuttlebutt and there was speculation, as there always is when a budget is coming forward. Naturally people last night went to fill up their cars before the budget came down because they had heard so much speculation about an excise tax increase. The only one who did not was myself. I did not dare go and do it, but everybody else in the country who had any sense did.

So, Mr. Speaker, as far as mukluks are concerned, the hon. member is in the muck without any luck.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The motion that has been put forward is to be seconded by the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River (Mr. Reid). I am going to permit the hon. member a brief intervention, but I must point out to the House that there

[Mr. Crosbie.]

is no allegation in the motion of any misconduct on the part of the minister or on the part of any other member. The motion and precedents to which I have referred, and to which the Minister of Finance (Mr. Crosbie) has referred, it would seem to me, ought to lay the matter to rest. However, I am prepared to hear briefly from the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River since he is named as the seconder of the motion.

Mr. John M. Reid (Kenora-Rainy River): Mr. Speaker, I would like to refresh your memory as to the precedents on this going back to 1975. Your Honour may recall that you were in the chair and at that point I was accused of having released budgetary information illegally. There was an investigation by the Committee on Privileges and Elections as a result of a decision subsequently taken by the House and after Your Honour had made a decision that, indeed, there was a prima facie case of privilege involved. I do not want to go into the details of that experience, but I do want to indicate—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I think the hon. member should realize that this is the point I have just made. That motion made an allegation directly against the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River. This motion makes no allegation against the actions of any member of the House of Commons. That is the fundamental difference.

Mr. Reid: Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that the motion says there have been budget leaks. Your Honour said in 1975 that the question of budgetary secrecy was one of the great constitutional conventions of our system, and that anything that broke that obviously put the people who had done that in contravention of our constitution.

It seems to me the fact that this is mentioned, with some evidence by the hon. member, is an allegation that the privileges of myself, the hon. member for Saint-Maurice (Mr. Chrétien), and other members of the House of Commons, have been breached.

I think we could have an argument as to whether in point of fact budgetary leaks did take place as alleged by the hon. member for Saint-Maurice, but that would be the job of the standing committee to decide. What is important is the fact that the hon. member for Saint-Maurice has brought forward some evidence to indicate that, indeed, a great deal about the budget was well known before the budget was presented to the House of Commons.

I am prepared to agree with the Minister of Finance (Mr. Crosbie) and also with the hon. member for Saint-Maurice that the budgetary procedures that we go through in this House may, indeed, be obsolete. It may well be that with the kind of mixture of financial considerations by the federal and provincial governments we must have more negotiations taking place at public meetings between the two levels of government. I accept that, but the point is that if the Minister of Finance is going to change the rules in midstream, he ought at least to let the House of Commons know. He did not do that, and we feel that he has in fact changed the rules in midstream. Had he told us, we probably would not be raising this point of order.